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ABSTRACT

Despite the relative novelty of lifelong learning in the People's Republic of China (PRC), significant achievements have been made, and China's potential for economic development and personal enrichment remains undisputed. Economic and social change, as well as technological advancements, have profoundly influenced educational development and increased the need for lifelong learning. The PRC's new market-oriented economic system has created a demand for skilled personnel. Additional demand comes from senior citizens, who desire self fulfillment and a higher quality of life. As a result, several facilities for the older population have become available. The most important reform has been that of educational administration. Whereas previously the government-funded public institutions were the most powerful, the private and semi-private institutions have achieved increasing influence and wider access to adult education programs. In addition, vocational education has been added to the junior, middle, and senior secondary schools, with a great increase in literacy and in-service training programs. Lack of financial resources, however, prevents widespread support and opportunities for innovation. Private and semi-private institutions, along with the media, must make further attempts to promote lifelong learning, with public institutions volunteering its facilities for the community. (YKH)

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Lifelong Learning in the People's Republic of China

by Huiping Wu and Qilian Ye

Lifelong learning is relatively new in the People's Republic of China. The notion was first introduced with the translation of the UNESCO report, "Learning To Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow", and since that time the importance of lifelong learning, both for economic development and personal enrichment, has been obvious. In addition, the size of the population, its geographic dimensions and large rural areas, and the current economic transition from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy has accented the value of lifelong learning. In 1993, guidelines for educational reform proposed the evolution of the current system of adult education into a lifelong learning system, and in 1995 legislation was passed to establish and improve upon a system of lifelong learning. During the 1990s, a host of institutions, many of them private or semi-private, developed. In spite of progress to date, there are many challenges facing the full implementation of a lifelong learning system. Among these are the current government focus on public school system reform, including higher education, and the lack of financial support. Regardless, the outlook is positive, driven by demand and shaped by the people.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of lifelong learning was first introduced to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the late 1970's, following the translation of *Learning To Be: The World Of Education Today And Tomorrow* (Faure, et al., 1972), a report issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Commission on the Development of Education. Since then, the attention and practice of lifelong learning have been centred on the field of adult education in the PRC. Although formal adult education programming has existed in the PRC for more than forty years and has provided a sound foundation for various types of programming and learning, the idea of lifelong learning as a systematic, comprehensive, structural and behavioural mode remains relatively new and still tentative.

Regardless of the late start with lifelong learning, significant achievements have recently been made in appreciating the concept and in implementing lifelong learning. In fact, lifelong learning is initiated and motivated more by the society at large, rather than as a "top-down" policy. It is believed by many educators

and officials, however, that the implementation of lifelong learning practices will become one of the key strategies in the PRC's ongoing educational reform and that it will play an important role in the twenty-first century as technology, social conditions, and international cooperation combine to create unique educational opportunities.

To date, there have been relatively few broad-based, formal discussions regarding the application of lifelong learning in the PRC, since it has been practised for only a few years and has not been identified as a priority in the national education development policy. This paper presents readers with an overview of lifelong learning in the Chinese context, through a discussion of the conceptual understanding, initiatives and potential, policies and practices, as well as existing problems. By examining what has been done in the PRC, the paper also attempts to analyze possible trends in lifelong learning and provide recommendations for its future evolution.

THE CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Learning To Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow (Faure, et al., 1972) was introduced at the beginning of a period of broad educational reforms in the PRC, when education was recognized as being of vital importance for the realization of the modernizations: agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. Consequently, the concept of lifelong learning was widely accepted within the educational establishment. At a minimum, educators felt a duty to articulate the theoretical possibilities of an innovative scheme that could dramatically stimulate the long term goals of Chinese education. In the PRC, lifelong learning is understood to be linked with the need for individual accomplishment, economic and social development, and educational equality. Also, in its ideal sense, lifelong learning should encompass the whole of society and engage each member in learning experiences that last for a lifetime.

Lifelong learning is a philosophical concept that explores the importance of education as it relates to individual accomplishments, motivation for self and societal improvement, and the expansion of conventional leisure activities. It will not be necessary to develop specific educational models for lifelong learning, as it is not formal schooling in the traditional sense, but embraces all modes of formal and informal learning throughout life. By adopting these principles, educators in the PRC are beginning to extend lifelong learning in order to improve the quality of life for all citizens, from the youth to the elderly.

The implementation of lifelong learning is thought to be a necessity in a changing labour market, in accordance with recent rapid cultural, scientific, and technological progress. People generally understand that their early years of traditional formal schooling are no longer adequate to cope with constant economic and social change. Lifelong learning has to date been strongly embraced as it relates to skills training and industrial competition; however, at the same time, the Chinese government is attempting to expand education initiatives in the public and private, formal and non-formal, academic and vocational areas of both professional skills updating and personal interest development in order to meet the different levels and requirements for economic and social enhancement and a healthy society. Although

there continues to be some pressure to educate workers primarily for short term gains, there is increasing recognition that lifelong learning perpetuates a long term, overall increased quality of life. The emphasis, at all levels, therefore, is on broad adaptability and continuing flexibility.

Lifelong learning is also important for the achievement of social democracy and equity. It is stated in both the constitution of the People's Republic of China and Education Law that Chinese citizens are entitled to equal educational opportunities, regardless of their race, gender, occupation, religion, or economic status (*Education Law*, 1995). The institutionalization of lifelong learning in the PRC will help accomplish this objective by providing continuing education opportunities for those who did not complete their formal schooling for various reasons. Indeed, a comprehensive commitment to lifelong learning could encourage large numbers of people who have previously been excluded from further education to participate.

Overall, lifelong learning in the PRC is evolving, albeit slowly, from an adult education system which was established in parallel with the formal school system more than forty years ago. Programming has included theoretical and practical training in a variety of fields and delivery systems. Included are literacy classes, general education, junior specialized training, senior specialized training, correspondence and television broadcasting programs at both the secondary and university levels, workers' universities, agricultural universities, and programs for upgrading of cadres and other management personnel. Lifelong learning is expanding the range of adult education programming in terms of purposes, age groups, content, and delivery methodologies. Beyond the widely accepted adult liberal education and vocational training programs which are required for a productive workforce, the lifelong learning paradigm is bringing personal interest, and recreational and leisure activities to the context.

SOCIAL INITIATIVES AND POTENTIAL

During the past fifteen years, the PRC has been undergoing a fundamental change, one marked by a shift from a planned economic system to a market-oriented economic system. This process has profoundly affected educational development and the education system as a whole. In concert with this change, the demand for lifelong learning has increased dramatically.

In response to the pressures arising from this economic and social change, the PRC has adapted well, applying modern techniques to age-old problems as they pertain to education and learning. Increased enthusiasm for lifelong learning among individuals, enterprises, and even entire communities has resulted from these pressures, particularly as they relate to economic change, rapid developments in science and technology, increased emphasis on individual achievement, and the overall need for educational expansion. Although the size of the population presents novel challenges, these have been confronted with a deep sense of urgency and responsibility.

Since 1978, when the economic reforms began, the market-oriented system has grown and developed within the PRC. This has been a significant and fundamental change, which has in turn brought about a vast need for personnel who understand

market-oriented economics from a variety of perspectives. However, given the size of the PRC, existing formal school and adult education systems have been unable to meet this demand, especially in the areas of business management, trade and finance, engineering, and legal services. This pressure for skilled personnel will likely remain unabated as continuing changes provide increased demand for personnel. In an effort to address this problem, a number of education and training institutions of various types and levels have been established.

Rapid developments in science and technology have also fuelled demand for lifelong learning. In particular, the introduction of newer technologies and production methods in developed countries has acted as a catalyst to promote much of the economic transformation in the PRC. As developed economies move to higher level production systems, more low and intermediate level production moves into the PRC. As a result, it is now apparent that all workers require a variety of skills and broad expertise which can be applied to many jobs, rather than the single set of skills that has been a trademark in the past.

The PRC has recently faced changes of unprecedented magnitude in its traditional industries (including, for example, textile production, mining, and heavy industry), and a large number of the workers in these so-called "sun-set" industries have been forced to change careers or take early retirement. In order for these industries to take advantage of market opportunities, or in some cases merely survive, their workforces must be upgraded to work at higher knowledge levels particularly with new technology. Many must also be cross-trained, developing skills that allow them to work beyond one narrow focus. Characteristics of the required learning in this environment have been described as high, new and fast. "High" refers to the higher level of learning and the higher qualification requirements; "new" refers to the new knowledge content and skill acquisition; and "fast" refers to learning concepts and skills more quickly and with higher efficiency levels. Although the economic transformation and technological advances have been major influencers affecting the need and desire for lifelong learning, it is recognized that industrial needs alone should not be the only or even the primary rationale for the development of a learning society.

While economic development has had a great impact in so far as satisfying material needs within the society, many Chinese citizens view learning later in the lifespan as a mechanism for meeting spiritual and cultural needs. In fact, regardless of the need for new working skills in the context of changing and higher technology, people are paying more and more attention to their personal needs and quality of life issues.

A noticeable push for lifelong learning in the PRC is coming from the growing population of senior citizens. More than ever before, the PRC is becoming a society with a large cohort of older citizens. According to a recent study, the portion of the population 65 years of age or older will by the end of this century have reached 130 million and account for 10% of the population (Xiang, 1996, p. 29). As the material life for this group improves, there will be increasing demand for a higher "quality of life", including lifelong learning opportunities.

Recently, special institutions for senior learners have emerged in Shanghai,

Beijing and a few other cities, and it is estimated that within the PRC there are now more than 5,000 "Senior's Universities" (Xiang, 1996, p. 8). Neither part of the regular school system nor the adult education system, these are private or semi-private institutions sponsored by social organizations. Their programs are quite diversified, and include artistic and leisure pursuits such as drawing, calligraphy, flower planting, *qi gong* (deep breathing exercises), *tai ji* (Chinese traditional shadow boxing), cuisine, foreign languages, music, dancing, and health care. This is a brave new departure for learning within the PRC, and it embodies the meaning and spirit of lifelong learning, well distanced from the formal school system and even the traditions of adult education as they are known in the PRC. It is a system which is driven solely by self-motivation, and the learning is for internal satisfaction as compared with learning that is driven by external needs. This type of programming contributes greatly to Chinese society and cultural development.

A further factor which will greatly support the development of lifelong learning opportunities relates to the nature of the educational system itself. Limiting factors confronting the PRC include its large population, a shortage of natural resources, and one of the lowest GNPs in the world, all of which have seriously hindered improvement in education. According to recent data, the PRC has approximately 200 million learners enroled (not including students in adult education) in its school systems, accounting for 25% of the world's student population. The total educational expenditure is 50 billion Yuan ($6.25US billion). This figure represents only 40 Yuan ($5US) per student per year (Xiang, 1996, p. 4). Given this fiscal environment, 30% of primary school graduates (grade six), 60% of junior middle school graduates (grade nine), and 75% of senior high school graduates (grade twelve) cannot be accommodated at the next level of education (Xiang, 1996, p. 14). The implementation and application of lifelong learning could be the key to solving this problem, and for this reason alone has monumental implications for the PRC.

POLICIES AND PRACTICE DURING THE REFORM DECADE

A review and analysis of policies and legislation since the beginning of educational reforms in 1985 suggests that lifelong learning will become one of the most important strategies for educational innovation in the PRC. And although lifelong learning was not clearly defined in *Decisions On Educational Reform And Development* (1987), the emphasis it places on subsequent reform and the evolution of adult general and vocational education clearly provides a form and foundation for the development of lifelong learning in the PRC.

The notion of lifelong learning was first formally described and proposed by the Chinese government in the 1993 *Programs For Educational Reform and Development*. This publication is considered to be the primary guiding document for recent Chinese educational reforms. Article 10 addresses the evolution of adult in-school education towards a system of lifelong learning by asserting that adult education should be used as the basis for developing a new type of education, one which sees the evolution of the traditional school education system into a system of lifelong learning. Further, the paper argues that this new learning should play a key role in improving the overall quality of life for Chinese citizens, as well as promot-

ing economic and social development (*Programs for Educational Reform and Development*, 1993). Thus, adult education in the PRC is seen as the foundation for lifelong learning and will be used as the basis for the development of lifelong learning policies, programs and practices.

In 1995, lifelong learning was defined and formally sanctioned through legislation, specifically in the PRC's Educational Law, which was passed on March 18th of that year. In Act 2 of the first chapter, the law states: "In meeting the needs of developing a socialist market economy and of social progress, the state shall promote a coordinated development of education of various types, and levels, carry forward educational reform and establish and improve a system of lifelong education" (*Education Law*, 1995). In Act 19 of the second chapter, the Law declares that "the state shall encourage the development of adult education in a variety of forms so that citizens may receive appropriate education in politics, economics, culture, science, technology, professional or vocational knowledge and lifelong education". Act 41 of Chapter Five specifies that "the state shall encourage schools and other educational institutions as well as social organizations to take measures in creating conditions for citizens to receive life-long education". (The distinction between lifelong learning and lifelong education is not, at this stage, made within the legislation, policy discussions or applications. And although this might be bothersome in some contexts, the overall benefits even without this distinction, cannot be overstated. Formally and practically, the PRC is clearly on the path to lifelong learning.)

Given this legislation and the direct references to a lifelong system, it is clear that an explicit and coordinated plan incorporating policies, programs and practices is necessary for what will be a time of major educational expansion and development. In light of this, goals have been established for the application of lifelong learning. These include reforms in the area of educational administration, a commitment to the implementation of compulsory education, a need to strengthen secondary vocational education, and greater emphasis to be placed on adult education.

At present, the most important educational reform in the PRC is the system-wide reform pertaining to educational administration. The public school system, which in the past has been fully government funded, has evolved into one where public institutions continue to be the major players, while private and semi-private institutions are developing their role as supplementary players. This has been necessary in order to help meet the increasing demand for basic education.

In parallel with the public school system, adult education institutions have in the past been sponsored for the most part by local governments, communities, and large industrial enterprises and companies. These institutions continue to be thought of as a component of the public system, separate and quite different from the newly-opened private and semi-private institutions which are sponsored by individuals and various social organizations and which require learners to pay full tuition fees. Regardless, private institutions are developing within the adult education field, the seeds of lifelong learning are beginning to take broad root and the resultant variety of institutions characterizes the formation of a newly developed and more fully diversified system. Although the size of the PRC and the characteristics of a diversified system may appear to be unwieldy, the restructuring as described will in the

long run be more effective in terms of meeting local educational needs and broader programming as required by a developing economy.

According to recent data (Xiang, 1996, pp. 8-9), by the end of 1993 no less than 16 private or semi-private universities and colleges had been sanctioned by the State Education Commission, and 800 private institutions were registered with local education bureaus. These latter institutions offer higher level continuing education, including foreign languages, professional training, and general interest courses. (Most of the registrants in these institutions are either university graduates or undergraduates.) At the secondary level, 30,000 private and semi-private institutions had been opened. These offer general knowledge courses and skills training. Interestingly, more than 5,000 institutions for senior learners emerged at the same time. The total number of private and semi-private institutions reached 60,000, including those offering formal primary and secondary school education. These numbers suggest that private and semi-private institutions are becoming major players practising and supporting lifelong learning programming. Overall, it is clear that the shift in policies and programming has made it possible for many more people to be involved in learning programs.

The nine-year compulsory education program has been strengthened in order to establish a firm basis for lifelong learning. In an economy with a population of 1.2 billion, the universal provision of educational opportunity has always been a significant challenge; however, it is a basic requirement which must be met if the goal of "lifelong learning opportunities for all" is to be realized. In this regard, the *Compulsory Education Law*, issued in 1986, has been a key strategy. It confirms the importance of education and the State's commitment to provide basic skills and knowledge to the population as a whole.

Data indicate that in 1949 approximately 80% of the population in the PRC was illiterate. However, during the period from 1949 through 1982, more than 140 million individuals acquired the tools of basic literacy through various forms of full- and part-time study involving day schools, night schools, correspondence courses, and literacy classes sponsored by local governments (Zhou, 1989, p. 27). At this time, more than halfway through the 1990's, the elimination of illiteracy continues to be a major priority. On average, more than 4 million Chinese develop basic literacy tools each year, and enrolment in the nine-year compulsory education program has reached 98% of the school age cohort (*Educational Statistics Yearbook of China*, 1996, p.125). It is expected that the PRC will achieve full participation in the nine year compulsory education program by the end of the century. This emphasis on basic literacy has paid major dividends and establishes the potential for lifelong learning.

Vocational education is a key component for a lifelong learning foundation in the PRC. In the past, primary education focused on general learning. Now, vocational education has been added to the junior, middle, and senior secondary school levels in order to address the balance between theory and practice, especially important to middle schools in rural areas. In 1991, slightly more than 50% of those enroled in senior secondary level were receiving vocational education training, reflecting since 1980 an increase of more than 600% (Guo, 1996, p. 154).

At the same time, in order to develop a readiness for lifelong learning, and for assuming responsibility for one's own learning, training in problem solving, and self-directed study and research techniques has been added to the curriculum at all levels. The exploration of personal interests and individual talents is also encouraged, as are leisure education activities. In this context, adult education programming is playing a major role.

To meet needs associated with economic development and technological change, 1987's *Decisions on Adult Education Reform* prescribed the need for in-service technical training and updating. Since then, great strides have been made in the area of in-service training programs. For example, from 1987 through 1991, 110 million persons participated in in-service training. Of these, 89 million enroled in skill development or technical training programs, while the remainder received training in management and administration. The number of persons taking advantage of in-service training has increased so rapidly that they now account for almost 60% of the total increase of 10.3 million learners between 1986 and 1991 (Guo, 1996, p. 156).

Overall program diversification is strongly encouraged, especially in the adult higher education system. Therefore, and in order to meet the growing demand for qualified personnel trained to professional levels, adult higher education has become an important component of the higher education system, particularly since 1979. According to 1994 data (*Educational Statistics Yearbook of China*, 1996, p. 125), there were more than 2.35 million persons enroled in adult higher education institutions, an increase of nearly half a million in just one year. In support of this, there are 1,172 full-time and part-time adult institutions of higher learning including 46 broadcast universities, 703 workers' universities, 4 agricultural universities, 170 management institutes, 245 institutes of education and management, and 4 correspondence colleges. All of these offer formal degrees or certificates issued by the State Education Commission. In addition, 836 universities and colleges from the public education system offer a variety of night or correspondence programs for adult higher learning, as do approximately 400 institutions newly established by the private and semi-private sectors. Also, State regulated self-study exam agencies are located in all provinces. The self-study exams are divided into 110 specialities with more than a thousand subjects, and, through to the end of 1992, 120,000 of 5 million participants had completed the entire program and obtained a degree or certificate. Given their flexibility and numbers, these self-study agencies will become increasingly important as lifelong learning grows and develops. As of 1993, adult higher education enrolment exceeded 1.4 million, equivalent to 65% of the total enrolment of regular full-time colleges and universities; the number of graduates from adult higher education reached 517,700, representing slightly more than 80% of the total graduate population (Ji, 1994, p. 298).

ONGOING PROBLEMS & POTENTIAL ENTHUSIASM

In light of the foregoing, it is clear that lifelong learning has taken firm root and has become ingrained within the educational system in the PRC. Not only are policies in place, but programming and practices are evident and widespread. The influence

is not confined to economic-based concerns, but rather the social aspects are considered just as important. Regardless of this, problems, including a shortfall in financial resources, decreasing support from certain levels of government, an imbalance in the development of programs from region to region, and the absence of a dominant strategic plan to establish a systematic structure for lifelong learning, exist.

Financial challenges are strongly influencing and disrupting the educational system in the PRC. At this time, particularly in light of the economic climate, the rate of technological change and increased social demands, the central government is not able to fully and adequately support the system. Ensuring funding for lifelong learning is crucial, yet the present circumstances make this challenge appear almost insurmountable. New and novel approaches for supporting education are obviously required. Most institutions having lifelong learning programming as their major focus, including seniors' universities and various continuing education programs, are private or semi-private. They have strong ideological support from social organizations and communities, but their fiscal survival relies primarily on tuition fees with some additional support from local businesses and other organizations. Most of these institutions will, consequently, be limited in terms of their ability to grow, evolve and adapt. They lack the potential for further accomplishment since they are not able to establish stronger and long term financial support.

It is important to note that in comparison with the many detailed policies relating to the reform of regular degree and certificate educational programs, there is a decided lack of concrete measures or strategies for medium to long term improvements in lifelong learning policies, programs and practices. The momentum exists, but the detailed plan and support is, for the most part, absent. Lifelong learning has been formalized in the 1995 *Education Law*, and as such has been accepted and, to a degree, institutionalized. However, lifelong learning is for the most part thought to be a personal need rather than a broad, economic and social trend for which the government should provide strong, effective and increased policy support and direction. Although the number of private and semi-private institutions that deliver lifelong learning is increasing rapidly, they lack official support and are faced by a future that suggests diminishing financial investment. There is broad sense of the potential value associated with lifelong learning, but the allocation of funds in what is a very complex system remains problematic.

Underfunded though they may be, lifelong learning opportunities are available in the coastal areas and in the big cities where economic development is more advanced. By contrast, however, in the larger rural and less developed territories, the elimination of illiteracy is still regarded as the main task. What may not be fully recognized is the role lifelong learning can play, through alternative delivery mechanisms for example, in the attack on illiteracy. Regardless, the basic literacy issue remains unsolved for large areas of the PRC, and until attitudes change and new priorities are recognized, the ideal of lifelong learning will be difficult to realize on a system wide basis.

The national priority continues to be public school system reform; thus, the conceptually broader notion of lifelong learning and a non-traditional system of continuing education has yet to be fully endorsed. The need to develop continuing

education programming is attributed to economic forces within the job market, rather than as a response to worker defined goals. There is a trend, nevertheless, to support more initiatives that arise from and reflect the individual perspective, including programming for seniors.

A related issue which undermines the potential for lifelong learning relates to the learning environment and teaching methodologies. Most institutions delivering what may be described as lifelong learning programming have limited funding, and as a result the teaching facilities are sparse. There is no opportunity to make use of advanced teaching and learning technologies, and this is reinforced by the reliance on teachers from the regular school system. The training these teachers have received is traditional, conservative and classroom based. The opportunity for innovation is stifled since the growth is being directed, albeit without intention, by proponents of the formal system. In fact, many of the programs bear a striking resemblance to full-time, formal school programs, not recognizing the distinctiveness of a lifelong learning philosophy and adult education practices.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parallel systems of formal general education and adult education have existed in the PRC for the past four decades. Lifelong learning, by contrast, has only been recently introduced. Though encouraged, institutions delivering lifelong learning programming are not financially supported by the government within the context of the current economic circumstances. As a result, it is not surprising to see considerable debate arising in educational circles as to whether lifelong learning should be separate from or integrated within the formal educational system.

In spite of the challenges, considerable progress has been made with regard to support for and the implementation of lifelong learning policies, programs and practices. The increasing number of local and community based lifelong learning initiatives and the strong demand from the population at large are features which strongly predicate future success. It is unreasonable, however, to suggest that the hurdles facing lifelong learning will be overcome in the short term, in part because they are intimately connected with a challenging economic environment and a variety of national development priorities. However, moderate growth in lifelong learning programming coupled with strong quality improvements in the design and delivery are feasible and structurally possible.

Within the context of the unique characteristics of the PRC and current stages of economic and educational reform, adult professional and vocational education and the related in-service training should be the main focus of lifelong learning development for the next ten years. The PRC remains in a transitional period from the former planned system to a market system, and during this phase the unemployment rate will continue to rise as changes sweep through major industries, some of which will be radically changed while others will simply disappear. Professional and vocational training for persons affected by these changes will be extremely important and most urgent. Major cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, have recently established "Workers' Employment Centres" and "Re-employment Guidance Centres" sponsored by the municipal governments. These are intended to help people who

have lost their jobs to obtain new employment. However, there is much more to be done on a nation-wide job training basis for the next few years, and in this regard the central government should take a more active role.

Though it is necessary and important to provide short-term solutions in respónse to job loss, it is also essential to adapt to the economic and social realities of the future. This involves longer term strategies. In fact, in-service training, skills upgrading, and management development are not only for those people who face unemployment, but also for those who wish to develop their careers. During the next few decades, the need for skills training will be varied and significant, fuelled by technological development and job losses, as well as the upgrading and career development market. Given the number of workers in the PRC, the sheer size of the market for this training will be immense.

Within the Chinese context, private and semi-private institutions should take more responsibility for promoting and implementing lifelong learning. There are two reasons for this. First, it is not possible for the government to control and fully support both the formal school system and non-formal programming. Government priorities are focused on the basic school system and the nine-year compulsory education program, as well as reform in higher education. It is not practical to expect stronger support, let alone effective, directive development for lifelong learning from the government. Second, the newly established private and semi-private sectors are more diversified and prone to having greater potential for educational innovation. This will serve the individual needs of learners better, though comparatively speaking, these institutions have had only a few years' experience, and this with very limited numbers. Further, these institutions are more flexible, more customer responsive, and quicker to respond to new programming needs. They focus more on general interest programs, and tend to stay away from formal programming with its stricter academic and professional standards. The problem of training teachers for lifelong learning programming remains unaddressed, but this can be overcome in time, particularly if these institutions reduce their reliance on teachers trained and developed within the formal system. It is expected that a *Private Education Law*, to be issued in late 1997, will provide support and encouragement for the private and semi-private sectors.

Although the distinction between the formal system of schooling and the broader efforts of private and semi-private lifelong learning institutions as described in this paper will continue to exist, efforts should be made to maximize the benefits of all existing facilities and services. This is particularly important given the funding challenges that face community-based learning programs. Public institutions should voluntarily make their facilities and services available to the community. These include libraries, computer labs, gymnasia, and classrooms. By doing this, public institutions could play a major role in the development of lifelong learning opportunities.

Increasingly, the media needs to be a mechanism for marketing lifelong learning, and all types of lifelong learning should be promoted and delivered through broadcast media with the assistance of broadcast universities and correspondence schools. Compared with the features of formal school education, programs and pat-

terns of lifelong learning are much more flexible and dynamic. Public media, such as television and radio, has the capacity to be the stimulus for distributing learning opportunities widely throughout society, particularly in the PRC where there are large geographic areas to cover with few available services.

Above and beyond the mechanics and rhetoric associated with lifelong learning, there is a strong, sincere and overriding drive for educational development in the PRC. Pressure for change and opportunities, from the society at the grass roots level, is profound, and lifelong learning has emerged as a major force, under difficult circumstances, supporting rapid economic and social development as well as individual fulfilment. Although there has not been a systematic investigation of lifelong learning, nor the development of a formalized structure, it is recognized as the primary tool for facilitating economic and social development in the PRC. As an old saying goes, "never too old to learn". In fact, learning is becoming an exciting lifelong undertaking in the PRC.

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